





# STUDIES

## in the Spirituality of Jesuits



The Future of Faith and Justice:  
A Critical Review of Decree Four

by  
Francisco Ivern, S.J.

Published by the American Assistancy Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality,  
especially for American Jesuits working out their *aggiornamento*  
in the spirit of Vatican Council II

## THE AMERICAN ASSISTANCY SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

consists of a group of Jesuits from various provinces who are listed below. The members were appointed by the Fathers Provincial of the United States.

The Purpose of the Seminar is to study topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and to communicate the results to the members of the Assistancy. The hope is that this will lead to further discussion among all American Jesuits--in private, or in small groups, or in community meetings. All this is done in the spirit of Vatican Council II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original charismatic inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the changed circumstances of modern times. The members of the Seminar welcome reactions or comments in regard to the topics they publish.

To achieve these purposes, especially amid today's pluralistic cultures, the Seminar must focus its direct attention sharply, frankly, and specifically on the problems, interests, and opportunities of the Jesuits of the United States. However, many of these interests are common also to Jesuits of other regions, or to other priests, religious men or women, or lay men or women. Hence the studies of the Seminar, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

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## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

by

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In his allocution of February 27, 1982, Pope John Paul II reminded the Jesuit provincials from throughout the world of the essential link between faith and justice:

Today we feel with ever growing urgency the need to promote justice in the Church's evangelizing action. When we think of the demands of the Gospel and at the same time of the influence of social conditions on practical Christian living, we easily understand why the Church considers the promotion of justice to be an integral part of evangelization (no. 8).

The pope went on to urge a clarity of roles in this mission of evangelization and spoke of the particular contributions to be made by priests and religious.

The words of the papal allocution were, I believe, an affirmation of the general thrust of Decree Four, "Our Mission Today," of the 32nd General Congregation. They were also a challenge to all of us Jesuits to clarify the meaning and implications of Decree Four so that we can continue to be effective apostles in our "service of the faith and promotion of justice." This clarification will be especially important in the months ahead as we prepare for the 33rd General Congregation.

For some ten years Father Francis Ivern was Father General Pedro Arrupe's counselor on social affairs. Consequently his reflections will be of great assistance in the task of clarifying our response to Decree Four. He offers an overview of the trends of the responses over the seven years since the end of the 32nd General Congregation. He then looks at the need for what he calls "a more diversified and more integrated" approach in the future and suggests some of the priorities and conditions if that approach is to be implemented.

In essence, these reflections of Ivern first appeared in a paper which he delivered during a Maryland Province gathering in June, 1980. Subsequently the members of the Assistancy Seminar requested me to edit his

paper for these *Studies*, with a Foreword and an Afterword of my own. Ivern's reflections here are those of a widely experienced Jesuit who has been intimately connected with faith-justice issues over the years. He is a Spaniard who holds his doctorate in social and political science from the University of Louvain. He worked in the social apostolate in India for many years. From 1968 to 1974 he served as advisor for social affairs for Father Arrupe in Rome; and in 1975 Father Arrupe chose him to be one of his general counsellors, especially for the promotion of justice. In 1979 Ivern moved to Brazil, and became a member of the Brazilian Province. Today he serves as director of the John XXIII Social Research and Action Center and of the Brazilian Institute of Development (IBRADES), both located in Rio de Janeiro. He is also the advisor to the provincials of the Southern Latin American Assistancy on questions related to the interpretation and application of Decree Four.

The critical review which Ivern makes of Decree Four emphasizes several major points which it may be helpful to highlight here by way of an introduction to his paper.

First, he makes clear for us once again that the "faith and justice" mission is the responsibility of the *whole* Society and not the domain only of those in explicit spiritual or social ministries. He notes that while the call has been answered by an "explosion" of activity at all levels of Jesuit apostolates there is continual need for reflecting on the orientations given in our responses.

Second, Ivern notes that so far in our variety of responses, we have tended to implement Decree Four by: (1) emphasizing the social-justice questions more than the faith problems which underlie those justice questions; (2) emphasizing direct action on social problems and action at a relatively low level more than reflective analysis of the problems and action at a higher level, for example, with those in power who can affect the structures of poverty and injustice; and (3) emphasizing socio-economic causes of injustice more than socio-religious and socio-cultural roots.

Third, in the effort to achieve what he calls a greater balance in the implementation of Decree Four, Ivern sees a significant contribution which can and should be made by the Society of Jesus in North America. He challenges us Jesuits of the United States to concentrate on the core of American culture or way of life and on the values that legitimate it. In



pursuit of that he feels that two areas need priority focus: faith-justice education and the development of a faith-justice spirituality.

Fourth and finally, Ivern raises the challenging topic of "choice of ministries," by his concluding remarks about the need for Jesuits to work at what he refers to as "higher levels of contact with reality," where more universal causes operate and where a more universal good (in the Ignatian sense) can be achieved; and the need for a shift of resources (men, time, finances) so that more effective responses can be made to new urgencies.

Ivern's analysis of the future of Decree Four is controversial. It could not but be controversial, given both the theme and the history of responses made so far in the faith-justice implementation. While affirming the sincerity and dedication of the responses, he calls for something deeper, more effective, more Jesuit. Although he addresses the topic with a certain abstract and general tone, the concrete and specific implications are evident.

At this point I shall let Ivern speak for himself. But later I shall, in my "Afterword," point to some of the implications which seem to have particular importance in the American Assistancy as we Jesuits review Decree Four in preparation for the 33rd General Congregation.

Peter J. Henriot, S.J.



# THE FUTURE OF FAITH AND JUSTICE; A CRITICAL REVIEW OF DECREE FOUR

by

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## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades the Society of Jesus has struggled faithfully to implement the decrees and directions stemming from three events that have profoundly marked our religious and apostolic life: the Second Vatican Council and our own 31st and 32nd General Congregations. Central to the movement of the Spirit in these three gatherings has been the engagement of the Church with the world. As we Jesuits sought to discern our own mission within that engagement, we articulated it in Decree Four of the 32nd General Congregation as being "the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement" (no. 2).

In the pages that follow, I would like to offer my own perception of how the Society of Jesus is striving to implement Decree Four and, more particularly, to suggest possible ways of responding to that Decree in the future. This is especially important, I believe, in the light of the upcoming 33rd General Congregation.

Present trends to implement Decree Four are perceived and evaluated very differently. This depends not only on our own reading and interpretation of the Decree itself and of the demands that it makes of us, but also on our own expectations about how far that Decree should have taken us in 1982, seven years after its promulgation. In fact, the Decree on Our Mission Today does not propose definite objectives or targets to be equally achieved by all and within a given period, either at the individual or at the corporate level. The Congregation simply proposes some general objectives and criteria to inspire and guide our lives and apostolic commitments. It then invites us--individuals, communities, apostolic works and institutions--to enter into a process of apostolic evaluation, discernment, and change in function of those objectives and criteria.

For different individuals, provinces, or countries, the starting points



or the points of insertion in that process are quite different. Moreover, the way and the pace in which they change are also conditioned by a variety of factors: some individual, others social; some internal, others external to the Society. For example, the age and occupational structure of a given community or province, the nature and size of the institutions for which we are responsible, the socio-economic, political, or cultural conditions of the country where we live and work--these and other factors may place obstacles or open possibilities for our mission, may accelerate or slow down the implementation process.

It is not the same to implement Decree Four in a young and growing Third World province, like Indonesia or the Philippines, and in aging Northern or Central European provinces, like those of Holland or Germany. The demands of the service of faith and the promotion of justice are not the same in socialist Yugoslavia, Poland, and Cuba as in prerevolutionary or revolutionary Central America, not the same in "national security states" like Chile and Argentina as in more developed countries of a liberal tradition like the United States or Canada.

For these reasons, comparisons obviously become difficult. What appear meager results in some provinces may in fact be the most or the best that could be achieved under prevailing conditions. On the other hand, the apparent progress and the remarkable achievements of other provinces may sometimes reflect situations and trends in the secular field for which neither the Church nor the Society is directly or primarily responsible. Attempts to give a synthetic view of present trends at the world level thus may result in a picture that no province recognizes as its own, that some find too bright or embellished, and others too dark or disfigured. The same applies to the question of future ways of responding to Decree Four. The answer depends not only on each concrete situation, but also on whether we feel that we are moving in the right direction, at the right level and at the right pace, or that a definite change of direction, level, or pace is required.

I say all of this at the outset not simply to win a benevolent hearing for my own views concerning present trends and future responses. Rather, I feel that, before we attempt to define these future responses, it is essential for us first to emphasize the need to look critically at present



trends in the light of the specific needs of each country or region and of our apostolic mission.

## PART I. PRESENT TRENDS

### A. The Justice "Explosion"

For many Jesuits the message of Decree Four is simple and clear. The service of faith remains our fundamental religious mission even today, but it has to be expressed and made effective through love; and this love, today more than ever, demands justice. In fact, in many places in the Society, Decree Four has become "the justice decree" or "the faith through justice decree." With a few exceptions, most of the efforts to implement the Decree have been inspired primarily by its justice dimension. These efforts have attempted, on the one hand, to give a greater social dimension to our traditional ministries, and, on the other, to increase our involvement in activities designed to express our solidarity with the poor or to promote justice at the individual, collective, and structural levels.

The Society of Jesus today is a large and worldwide institution, facing a problem of decreasing numbers and of an aging population. Taking that into account, we must acknowledge that the effort made to enter into the process of renewal and change asked by the last General Congregation, and in particular by Decree Four, has been very considerable. If the progress has not been greater, it has not been for lack of goodwill. It has certainly not been for lack of meetings and discussions: province assemblies, enlarged consultations, community discernment, evaluation programs, and the like. To be honest, good will and meetings have helped, and progress has indeed taken place in a number of key areas of our life and ministry.

There have been numerous changes in line with Decree Four, at the personal and community level, and particularly in the training and formation of young Jesuits. Moreover in the apostolic field a number of new initiatives have flourished, often undertaken by individuals and small groups. But it is significant that few major changes have occurred in the overall distribution of our manpower and other resources. We have not committed large numbers to new and important corporate apostolic works nor made substantial reductions or changes of orientation in traditional works and ministries.

In my view, the most significant trend has been the "explosion" of our social commitment or of the social dimension of all our apostolates. Previously we tended to see this social aspect as almost the monopoly of a relatively few individuals or of some specialized groups or centers. But in different ways and degrees, the social dimension has gradually begun to permeate most of our traditional apostolates: education, pastoral action, theological reflection, reviews and other publications, the retreat movement, and so on. The efforts in the American Assistancy to give a greater social orientation to our educational apostolate--particularly to secondary education--deserve particular mention.

This social "explosion" has resulted sometimes in the diminished importance, both in absolute and relative terms, of some of the specific social works undertaken by the Society, and especially of social-action and reflection centers. It is true that some new social centers have been established recently (for example, in England, Ireland, Canada, Spain, and the United States). But on the whole, in Latin America, Europe, and Asia, the personnel working in those social centers--which were at one time the backbone of our social apostolate--has dramatically decreased. Several factors have contributed to this: the overall diminution of our manpower, the crisis of institutions, the emphasis on life experiences rather than on intellectual commitments, and the like. But I believe that the diminished importance of these and other specific social works has been mainly occasioned by the diffusion of the social dimension to other apostolic areas, and by the assumption by other groups of functions formerly performed almost exclusively by Jesuits engaged in those works. For example, today many individuals and groups that are not members of specific social centers reflect on current social issues. In addition, lay groups or movements engaged in social action frequently receive guidance for their work from Jesuits who are not always part of the social sector as traditionally understood.

Another important trend has been the gradual movement towards the poor (for example, in the educational and pastoral fields) and the growing importance given to personally experiencing the conditions in which the poor live and work. In keeping with this trend, provinces in the United States and other countries have offered Jesuits several interesting opportunities for such experience. I refer specifically to the "Horizons for Justice" program, which for several years has exposed Jesuits of the United States

to Latin American situations of poverty and oppression, and to the more recent "Companions for Justice" program, which takes place within poor areas of this country. Furthermore, in many countries numerous individuals and communities have changed their place of residence and their life-style to be closer to the poor.

In several Assistancies of the Society there have also been increased interprovincial and international exchanges and collaboration to assimilate and implement better some of the demands of Decree Four. Provinces have also cooperated to study some common problems related to human rights, faith and ideology, migrant workers, and socio-pastoral work among the rural classes or in urban marginal areas. While some of the trends in this direction were already present before the 32nd General Congregation, they have multiplied in recent years. In June, 1980, a meeting was held in the Curia in Rome to evaluate these trends (see *Promotio Justitiae*, no. 18, July, 1980).

In spite of the numerous changes that have taken place, I believe that many Jesuits accept Decree Four but feel a certain sense of disappointment or frustration. They have various reasons. Some feel disappointed because they would have liked bigger and more radical changes in line with the promotion of justice. Others feel frustrated because they honestly do not know exactly what to do or because they sincerely do not feel that the Society can or should move in the direction which some would seem to advocate.

Aware of this situation--worldwide as well as in the American Assistancy--I will attempt an explanation for some of these apparent frustrations and disappointments and will make some suggestions for the future. I make my suggestions, however, more as a necessary complement than as an alternative for the efforts and trends that I have described and that I believe should continue.

#### B. A Uniform but One-sided Interpretation

Decree Four is addressed to all Jesuits throughout the world. It is not written with particular situations or models of society in mind. Hence its implementation demands a considerable effort of interpretation and translation in the face of concrete conditions that often go beyond the limits of a single Jesuit province and characterize a whole geographic or cultural area. But Decree Four, while not taking into account particular conditions, does contain analyses of reality conducted from different



perspectives and reflecting different apostolic situations or problems. Sometimes the analysis is conducted in terms of faith: of human understanding and acceptance of God and of human dependence on him. Sometimes it is conducted in terms of justice: of social discrimination, inequality, and structural injustice.

In the real world the problems that these analyses reflect often co-exist side by side, in different combinations and proportions, in one and the same country or region. From a doctrinal and global perspective the problems appear as mutually interconnected--as effects or causes one of the other, or as dimensions of one and the same problem. Since Decree Four speaks explicitly from that doctrinal and global perspective, it directly emphasizes that interconnectedness. It does so in an attempt to give a coherent and unified interpretation of reality today.

However, we need to note clearly that the situations and problems characterized as "faith-justice" issues--interconnected though they may be--are different and culturally conditioned. Hence they also require different solutions and pastoral approaches. It is true that the decree speaks of this diversity and of the need to "cultivate a great adaptability and flexibility Within the single, steady aim of the service of faith and the promotion of justice" (no. 7; also 53-55). But the strong insistence of the Decree on the close union between faith and justice at the doctrinal level, and also on the "de facto" interrelations between the two especially at the global level, has somehow obscured the fact that different countries, and even the several regions of the same country, face very different concrete faith-justice problems. These problems have different origins and manifestations and, while interconnected, cannot simply be reduced one to the other. I believe that failure to appreciate this has often led to a rather uniform but one-sided interpretation and application of the Decree.

During the past seven years, under the influence of Decree Four, the society has tackled faith-justice problems almost everywhere mainly from the angle of the promotion of justice, and much less from the service-of-faith point of view. I am not nor do I wish to be introducing any dichotomy or dualism. I am simply stating that in general we have emphasized the justice demands of faith rather than those factors in our belief which condition our understanding and acceptance of these justice demands. Even as far as the promotion of justice is concerned, I believe we have focused



our attention too exclusively on its socio-economic causes, and not enough on its socio-religious and socio-cultural roots. We have focused more on the attainment of short- or middle-term objectives and less on long-term policies and strategies to combat injustice.

It is not a question of either this or that, but rather of emphasis and of an ordering and articulation of priorities in our apostolic evaluation and planning. Without denying the need and validity of what has been done so far, I still feel that most present efforts do not adequately represent all that the Decree demands from us. Because of this the implementation process has been somehow limping: advancing mainly on the "justice with faith" leg and not so much on the "faith with justice" leg of the Decree.

### C. Diversity of Socio-Cultural and Socio-Religious Situations

In those regions or situations in the Society where the "justice leg" of Decree Four found familiar or favorable terrain, where the living conditions of the majority of the population made it evident that faith could not truly exist and develop without effective love and justice, most Jesuits have understood and accepted the need and validity of the "justice decree." If they have not made greater progress even in those regions, we have to attribute the difficulty to more than external conditions, or limitations in apostolic planning and government, or simply personal and institutional resistances to change. We also need to acknowledge the fact that some Jesuits felt uneasy about interpreting all the weight of their religious and apostolic tradition directly in terms of justice. They were reluctant to learn to advance on what they saw as only one leg. For these Jesuits the difficulties increased when a few of those whom they viewed as marching on only one leg really began to limp, wander off the track, or simply fall down. Unfortunately, when we demand substantial or radical changes from an individual or an institution, the mistakes or failures of a few may be enough to slow down the whole process of change, if not to block it entirely.

Some may argue that, even before the Decree Four was promulgated, many Jesuits had already been walking on one leg and for quite a long time! All the same, it was not precisely on the justice leg that they were leaning. The 32nd General Congregation did indeed ask from them a shift of weight or of emphasis in apostolic priorities which they did not always understand

and were not always ready to accept--at least in the way in which it was presented to them.

On the other hand, in some regions injustice was not so immediately evident and widespread. Thus in many of the so-called "developed" nations the problems of the majority of the people presented themselves not so much in terms of material need, injustice, or social oppression, but in terms of effects of technological advances, apparent abundance, and unchecked freedom. The natural and spontaneous movement of societies living under such conditions is not directly towards a radical change called for by justice. In these situations, to try to march, only or mainly, on the "justice leg" became even more difficult and problematic. We could certainly give a greater social dimension to existing apostolic commitments. We could also increase the number of those engaged in different types of social ministries. And in many cases this was exactly what was done. But to justify in ideological or cultural terms--and particularly in the name of our religious mission--the main thrust of what appeared to be a "justice decree," we were often forced to follow a longer and roundabout path.

In order to justify a review of all our apostolates in function of the promotion of justice, we came to look for reasons not directly in the mainstream of our own culture and society. For here the key problem did not seem to be exactly one of injustice. Rather, we looked into those pockets of poverty and those marginal areas or groups which, while being part of our society, did not really have a proper place in it. They were not integrated into our "system" and therefore could help us to raise questions "from the outside." By thereby identifying the root causes for that unjust marginalization, we could conclude that even in our free democratic and advanced societies the problem was, after all, also one of injustice.

Yet in order to strengthen this approach we had to broaden our horizons. We tried to discover further evidence for the injustice in which the majority of the world's population lives today. We recognized that somehow we were also responsible for those unjust situations and thus our society--our culture, our socio-economic system, our institutions and structures--were also part of the overall picture described by Decree Four. We were part of that picture as the violators of justice, as the oppressors of the world's oppressed.

This approach, of course, has its limitations and also its dangers.



We cannot push it too far. If the rich and developed societies of the First World are sick, then present poverty and injustice at home and abroad appear to be symptomatic of that sickness--important surely, but still only symptomatic.

I do not deny that in societies like that of the United States the conclusions we can arrive at, through a direct and almost exclusive "justice approach," may in fact be ultimately correct. Nor do I deny that the strategy followed (that is, on the one hand, to increase social awareness through a more direct involvement, and on the other, to use existing injustices to question the system from the outside) is a valid one. At least it can effectively spearhead the questioning and conscientization process. But we must recognize that from a cultural, an ideological, and even a faith point of view, the starting points for the process of change, the strategies to be deployed, and even the objectives to be achieved are quite different in First and Third World countries.

What does this mean in the concrete? In many First World societies today the majority of the populace may already possess the basic social goods. Here one of the main functions of Christianity or of the Church is often seen to be to defend and preserve that possession, that "heritage of the good life." Thus we obviously cannot adopt the same approach here as in Third World societies where most basic social goods are not yet a reality for the vast majority of the people. In fact, in the Third World the duty of the Church appears to be to join the struggle, already under way, to acquire those goods for the people. In the face of flagrant and widespread injustices affecting a majority, to preach liberation for the poor and powerless masses and to demand greater justice from the few that control most of the available wealth and power may not be easy. But at least it appears to be the obvious thing to do--if we do not want to be left out of the historical and irreversible process that is every day gathering more momentum in those societies.

In the midst of apparent abundance and freedom, however, we are faced with a "good life" which is highly priced because often acquired through hard work and sacrifice. Here it is not easy nor even wise to try to convince the average individual or family either that they are living in an unjust system or that by being part of that system they are the cause of the oppression and injustice in today's world. And it is more difficult still

to tell them what they can and should concretely do to modify effectively that situation.

Pastoral problems also present themselves differently in First and Third World countries. In the Third World the poor and oppressed are the vast majority, and this quantitative factor has necessary qualitative implications. In those situations ideology can easily spearhead a movement for change, and any attempts to legitimate or defend the status quo can be detected and fought against. Furthermore, in those circumstances it is evident that we must give concrete social relevance to religion as a significant factor for change. For the Church this is not merely a question of duty but of survival. The whole dynamism of those societies leads us to fight for values that are not yet possessed, for a "God" that is still very far from being a reality.

In First World situations, on the contrary, the majority finds itself in rather comfortable conditions. There is a wide consensus about societal goals to be pursued. The legitimating function that ideology plays is deeply embedded, all-pervading, and difficult to combat. Often the problem is not so much that of giving social relevance to religion, but rather of freeing religion from values that too easily tend to be absolutized and identified with it. Frequently religion and the Church have become part of the legitimating mechanism for the status quo.

In one situation the need for action and radical change is evident; in the other, the only action contemplated is that required to keep the system going and to thwart those inside or outside forces that may threaten our own way of life. In the two situations, both from a cultural and from a faith point of view, the policies and strategies for individual and corporate conversion and liberation are quite different. We must adapt to the way a society conceives and understands itself, culturally and religiously. If we do not bring the faith-justice problems to this cultural level, a too direct or too exclusive justice approach might in both situations be dangerous and counterproductive as far as the faith is concerned.

In the case of the Third World, we might lead people to believe that tomorrow or the day after tomorrow--after the social revolution has taken place and new structures replace the old ones--God and his kingdom are somehow going to become a reality for them, are going to be "possessed" as a social good. We risk setting a purely socio-economic, political, or cultural



limit to the Christian search for what is always more. We close or reduce the horizons of a process of change that should remain always open and without limits. We risk bringing the people to, and leaving them at, that point where others who live in the First (or the Second) World now find themselves--socially sated but spiritually starved.

In the case of the First World, we narrow our range of response if our emphasis is merely on the poverty and injustice which now exist at home and abroad and on the concrete social changes now needed to suppress them. If we limit ourselves to questioning the system--our culture or our way of conceiving and expressing faith itself--only as far as the social-justice dimensions are concerned, then we risk touching merely some of the fringes or manifestations of the faith-justice problem as it is presented to us by Decree Four. We are in danger of leaving intact some of the deeper roots of the problem.

To understand this, we need to note that, through the mediation of love, faith and justice are closely interconnected--so closely that there cannot be faith without love nor love without justice. Or to put it in another way: Unbelief leads ultimately to injustice; and injustice is a manifestation of unbelief and also leads to it. But this does not imply that the root causes of the unbelief that leads to injustice--the root causes of our materialism or secularism, or our religious indifference, or our false or ambiguous images of God--can always be expressed adequately in justice terms. Nor does this mean that the ultimate causes of injustice are always to be found in the social field. The symptoms may appear the same, but the sicknesses that provoke them may be different and hence require a different therapy.

Some may say that the gospel solution looks much more simple and universal: "Love and practice justice and thus you will prove to me that you really believe." But today, in many countries, for people to learn how to love and practice justice in the way that the present situation demands, it may be necessary first to remove a number of obstacles, to change deeply ingrained attitudes or mind-sets. Some of these may be of a social nature, but others are of a more cultural, personal, or spiritual nature. They should neither be ignored nor minimized.

PART II. NEW RESPONSESA. A More Diversified Approach

Against this background of our present efforts to implement Decree Four, I suggest that the first mark of our future response is that it should be more diversified.

More diversified, because we have to take more seriously into account the different socio-cultural and socio-religious situations prevailing in different countries, regions, or sectors of society. These situations demand that we tackle the faith-justice problems differently: sometimes through a more specific faith approach leading to greater social awareness; sometimes through a more direct justice approach giving concrete social relevance to the faith that we profess; or sometimes, finally, through a combination of these two approaches, emphasizing one or the other according to the concrete apostolic needs of each situation.

More diversified, because not only at the international but also at the national level, particularly in countries like the United States, we cannot limit ourselves to delivering a message that only the poor, the oppressed, or the victims of injustice would understand. We have also to find the way to conscientize "according to the gospel . . . those who have power to bring about social change" (no. 60), those "who bear some responsibility over the social structures of society" (no. 40). This conscientization of the influential will demand that we work on the way in which people understand and practice their faith, and on the ideological or cultural factors that condition that understanding and practice. In such situations we cannot simply keep on repeating, in a rather "voluntaristic" fashion, that Christians should love and be just.

More diversified, also, because we cannot limit our apostolic objective to work only "for, with and like the poor," to know and experience the way they live, to learn from them, and so on (no. 50). This objective is surely necessary. But we must also strive to suppress the roots of poverty and injustice by working at levels and employing means to which the poor usually do not have access. We must make our own priestly and religious contribution in order to change those structures of society that shape "people's ideas and feelings, their most intimate desires and aspirations," and hence condition the spiritual and material liberation of poor and rich alike



(no. 40). This might involve us, for example, in contact with political and military leaders, and in dialogue with members of the business community.

More diversified, finally, because we have to combine concrete experience of reality and reflection on that experience with a serious study and knowledge of reality. Such knowledge cannot arise from any mere experience--that is, from an experience of conditions here and now, or a reflection limited to such an experience. That knowledge can only be acquired through a systematic analysis of reality, of past and present trends, conducted with the help of philosophy, theology, and the human sciences. All this demands solid preparation and often all the time and energy that a person possesses (nos. 36 and 44; also 25-26).

This last point needs amplification. We may not be able to accept all that Marx or Lenin are supposed to have done for the poor of the world, nor all the reasons that motivated them to do it. But we must recognize that whatever they may have done for the poor was not the simple result of a personal life-experience. Rather, it grew out of a commitment arising from a stringent analysis of society and of the forces which they perceived as bringing about poverty and perpetuating it. In emphasizing this, I mean simply to point out that there are social commitments that mark deeply a person's life and work, and that these commitments are not merely the fruit of a direct personal experience. Such deep commitments can and do arise from a serious and systematic study of the reality around us, a study undertaken for an ideal--in our case, for an apostolic ideal. This applies to commitments both in the area of poverty and injustice and in the area of unbelief and atheism.

I know Jesuits who, without any previous social commitment, but simply following the recommendations of the last General Congregation--in faith and blind obedience, I would say--have chosen to live for some time with and like the poor. They have often derived great spiritual profit from that experience, and sometimes an effective commitment to justice has in fact resulted from it. But these Jesuits, I am afraid, are few in number. More numerous--and more effective--are those who have opted to work for the poor, even to live with and like them, not merely out of faith and blind obedience, nor on account of any previous experience, but because they have become committed to the promotion of justice after realizing that most of the poor in today's world are not simply poor but are also the victims of injustice.

We often fail to estimate correctly the degree to which ideological factors condition our religious motivation and commitment. This failure can cause what I have called a "voluntaristic" approach to social involvement. Frequently it also causes a rather simplistic and ineffective approach to the service of faith and to the promotion of justice. A more diversified approach leads us beyond that "voluntarism" to a commitment solidly grounded in the stringent social analysis called for by Decree Four (nos. 44 and 74).

#### B. A More Integrated Approach

Our future response to Decree Four has to be not only more diversified, but also more integrated--because whether we begin with faith or with justice, these two inseparable dimensions of our unique mission must somehow be always present. They must be present at all the stages of the process of change: from the initial motivation, through the means that we employ, and up to the final objectives that we pursue.

In some situations, dominant secularism, materialism, or consumerism may be "closing people's minds and hearts to the divine dimensions of reality" (no. 5); or the achievements of the human mind may dazzle men and women, make them forget their ultimate meaning, and lead them to a loss of the sense of God (no. 5). These problems may require a specific missionary or pastoral approach not necessarily or immediately expressed in explicit justice terms. Yet even then, unless we gradually open people's minds and hearts to the social dimensions of reality while opening them to always higher spiritual values, our efforts may result in new forms of practical atheism, or in a comforting, soul-satisfying, but socially irrelevant and sterile "spiritualism."

In other situations, we may have to challenge faith directly in the name of the inhuman and oppressive conditions under which the majority of the people suffer. But even in these cases the Christian contribution must not be reduced to mere insertion into a process of personal, social, or structural change which has its own dynamism and rules unrelated to faith. The whole process--in all its moments and stages--needs to be illumined and guided by "that evangelical vision of humanity, of things and events" which the Church has acquired "through revelation, historical experience and the reflection of faith" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 35). Otherwise, though well intentioned and to all appearance rightly motivated, the



liberation that we promise is going to be partial and short-lived--if it does ever arrive.

In the concrete order of pastoral practice and priorities, this means that within the same Jesuit province, within the same country, the different approaches that we adopt should interrelate and ultimately converge and meet. The meeting ground cannot always be at the social, cultural, or pastoral level, because it is precisely there where the differences of policy and strategy often manifest themselves. But we can always meet on the basis of the faith-contents that should mark all our approaches. A renewed service of the faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement, remains the all-encompassing objective and the main driving force behind Decree Four.

For that convergence to take place and to offer the basis for a coherent and unified apostolic project at the corporate level, all of us have to collaborate effectively in the variety of apostolates in which we are engaged. There has to be an effort towards a greater dynamic integration of the faith-justice dimensions of our mission on the part of all individuals and institutions. If we start with the paralyzing assumption that what each one of us is doing is right and does not need to be changed or improved, we shall never converge and meet. We should question ourselves and not assume too easily that *any* service of the faith--any educational scheme, any sermon or retreat, any research project--is always a service of "the faith that does justice." On the other hand, we cannot assume either that *any* promotion of justice--any social advocacy, any presence among the poor, or any work for the oppressed--is *ipso facto* a service of the faith or can lead to faith. Otherwise, we shall never advance towards a fuller understanding and implementation of the demands raised by the 32nd General Congregation.

The same is true at the international level. Contacts between First and Third World Jesuits can prove extremely useful to make us understand better the demands of faith and justice in the world. But for these exchanges to develop in a constructive dialogue, they presuppose a minimum of integration of the faith-justice dimensions on the part of all those concerned. They should in turn contribute to strengthen that integration. It is only on the basis of a well-integrated approach that Jesuits belonging to different socio-cultural and socio-religious traditions and representing

different approaches can in fact fruitfully meet and discuss faith and justice issues.

International exchanges should not become a one-way learning process or result in an indiscriminate attempt to import from, or export to, other socio-cultural areas those approaches which may have proved useful in one region. It is true that all of us need to be questioned "from the outside" and can certainly learn from others--particularly today when problems are so global and interdependent. Some Churches have reflected on their situations and role much more seriously than others have done and we can profit from this fact. However, we should not fail to develop our own specific and integrated approach to faith and justice, so that we can give to fellow Jesuits in other regions a reasonable account of our faith as we try to live and practice it in our own concrete situation. In the measure in which we develop such an approach, we shall also be able to sustain a critical and constructive dialogue with others, contributing to their Christian growth as they contribute to ours.

First World countries such as the United States should not underestimate the important contribution they can make to the faith-justice debate from their own socio-cultural and religious context. This contribution, though different, is relevant for Jesuits living and working in other situations. The future of the international dialogue and collaboration that Decree Four expects from us (no. 81) will continue to depend on the "faith that does justice" input in our overall apostolic commitment. As this input increases, the basis for the collaboration will also become stronger and wider. Today, experience seems to indicate that an effort toward a greater integration of the faith-justice dimensions of our mission is required from all Jesuits, and not only from those working in traditional "spiritual" or "faith ministries."

### PART III. PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE ACTION

What can be said specifically about the future response of the Society of Jesus in the United States? Aware that I speak as an outsider--but a very interested outsider--I would suggest four major areas in which a more diversified and integrated commitment to the implementation of Decree Four should express itself: (1) a better planned corporate presence both in the



world of poverty and injustice and in the world of unbelief and religious indifference; (2) interdisciplinary reflection on the socio-religious and socio-cultural factors leading ultimately to injustice; (3) faith-justice education; and (4) the development of a spirituality and spiritual formation that meet the faith-justice needs of First World countries. These are not new areas--nor the only ones--but I believe they are areas in which large and renewed effort is required.

I also want to point out some conditions which I consider necessary for the realization of those objectives: (1) While keeping a vital contact with concrete situations, we should shift some of our best resources to a higher level of contact with reality; moreover, all of us should devote more time to reflecting on our work in the light of our faith-justice commitment; (2) we should free men and resources to accomplish the new tasks that the present situation requires; and (3) we should foster the discipline, the austerity or "asceticism," that the performance of those tasks demands.

#### A. Major Areas of Commitment

##### 1. Corporate Presence

We Jesuits need to continue to be questioned from outside about the core of our own culture and way of life. We need the stimulus and critique which comes from marginal groups or areas within our own country and also from other countries, particularly in the Third World. But this questioning and critique, if it is to be effective, should come not merely through a few isolated individuals, prophets, or "lone rangers." Rather, it must come mainly and in a more planned and integrated way through projects or ministries corporately undertaken and supported by a province, a group of provinces, or a whole assistancy. Individual efforts are very important, but they do not and cannot dispense the body of the Society from a well-planned, active presence in those sectors or groups which are in need and which experience our culture and values from a perspective quite different from that of the majority. From what I understand, the recent cooperative efforts of the Maryland and Chicago Provinces in the Jesuit Appalachian Ministry provide a good example of this kind of corporate involvement. However, we should also ensure similar commitments in those sectors or areas that best exemplify the unbelief or religious indifference of our culture.



We may from time to time invite Jesuits from Third World regions to address some of our province meetings or take part in some of our renewal programs. But I think that these contributions would probably have a wider and more lasting effect if we channel them through groups or institutions in our own provinces which have, if not the same views, at least the same or similar concerns. In this way we would be able to discern better the ideas and experiences from other regions that can be integrated into our own approach to faith-justice issues or that can raise basic questions concerning that approach. A good example of what I mean is the recent research project on "Human Rights, Needs and Power in an Interdependent World," conducted by the Woodstock Theological Center in collaboration with the Center of Concern and Jesuits and other groups from Latin America.

These vital lines of service and communication with the world of injustice and unbelief are essential at the personal and the corporate levels. The condition of the poor may not be the only or the main problem in our own society, the problem on which all or most of our efforts or resources should directly concentrate. But the poor and the oppressed should always have our preferential love and dedication. Their social situation today should remain one of our top concerns. On the other hand, the suppression of unbelief and atheism, in all its personal and social expressions, still remains the ultimate objective of our apostolic mission. But in all our apostolic responses, it is usually from contact with the reality of injustice and unbelief that the most effective questioning begins. This is a questioning which should lead us to seek the roots of the problems of which the oppressed and the unbeliever are the main manifestations, but of which to some extent all of us are also the victims (no. 23).

## 2. Interdisciplinary Reflection

For the Society of Jesus in the United States, I believe that the main corporate thrust, enlightened and stimulated by all those "outside" contributions and critiques, should be a concentration on the core of the American culture or way of life and on the values that legitimate it. The position of Jesuit apostolates in this country enables us to deal with those major factors that in our own tradition condition people's understanding of the world, of man and woman, and of social relationships, and thus have bearing--even if not always direct and immediately evident--on faith-justice problems.

I also feel that in the two expressions "unbelief leading to injustice" and "injustice leading to unbelief," the Society in the United States should give some priority to the first expression. It should concentrate, not exclusively but primarily, on all those manifestations of theoretical or practical atheism, those false or ambiguous beliefs, that in developed and technological societies of a supposedly Christian or Jewish-Christian tradition ultimately affect the relations among people and also among nations. Of course from the manifestations or symptoms we should pass on to the causes. These will be found in the socio-economic areas no doubt, but also in the philosophical and cultural fields. They will be found in the personal and social values, in the representations and symbols that mark a people's culture and way of life.

The 32nd General Congregation lays particular stress on theological reflection (no. 60). It is evident that we have to conduct our reflection on current problems in the light of faith and that theological input therefore is essential. But I would also emphasize--as Decree Four and the Decree on Jesuit formation do in several passages--the need for the contribution of other disciplines. Of particular importance are philosophy and the social sciences, including not only economics, sociology, and political science, but also disciplines like social psychology, religious sociology, and cultural anthropology. We should increase the input into our apostolic reflections of all those who can enlighten us on the philosophical, socio-cultural, and socio-religious roots of the problems confronting us. Otherwise, there is serious danger of illegitimate reductions, oversimplifications, and hasty conclusions.

It is true that we need to recognize the important contributions of liberation theology, in regard both to contents and method and to positive impact on Christian social commitment and practice in Latin America. However, this theological approach would gain from the contribution of other disciplines for example, philosophy. In my opinion, the lack of a serious philosophical analysis in much of today's ecclesial debate on "human liberation" is alarming. There are other disadvantages in a reflection on social injustice conducted almost exclusively in theological terms, relying a little on the social sciences only, or using an analysis of socio-economic reality heavily conditioned by particular philosophical or ideological assumptions. This could lead us, on the one hand, to attribute "scientific" value in the social field



to theological considerations, thus depriving them of their specific religious, inspirational, and symbolic nature. On the other hand, it could lead us to give a kind of religious or sacred sanction to what are only particular socio-economic or political theories or ideologies. The final outcome could be both unscientific and nontheological. If we are not careful, pseudoreligious and pseudoscientific approaches, by reinforcing each other, could ultimately suppress the critical quality that should distinguish all our reflection.

In the American Assistancy there are already some good examples of interdisciplinary reflection in institutions like the Woodstock Theological Center and the Center of Concern, in the work of which several disciplines are usually involved. There is also significant research on current problems going on in the theological centers and in many of the universities. But we need to strengthen much more these "poles" of reflection, by reinforcing institutions that already exist and by freeing up energies and creating times and spaces within other institutions for that type of reflection. All this is very much in line with the demands of Decree Four.

Of course, it should always be an interdisciplinary reflection that starts from our social reality, falls back on it, and profits from the experience of those working in daily contact with that reality. It is only such a reflection that will provide us with the theoretical and doctrinal framework within which we should evaluate and revise all our apostolic commitments, but especially our commitments in the two areas that, in my view, deserve priority in the United States: faith-justice education and the development of a spirituality or spiritual formation adapted to present needs.

### 3. Faith-Justice Education

Education in "the faith that does justice" appears as one of the top priorities for the Society in this country. It is unclear, at least in my view, whether the formal Jesuit educational institutions, in the way they exist and operate now, would be the best or the only vehicles to carry out that key educational function. Can we impart an education open to higher social values and to the service of others mainly in the classroom, for example, through the teaching of a few well-chosen disciplines by a few well-prepared people? Or should we organize special courses or seminars, or supplement classroom education through extension departments, or use



still other means? These are for me open questions. Whatever the answers, of course, we need to free some of our best men and resources for this particular educational purpose. We cannot assume a priori that what we are now doing already meets this primary educational need, a need which is also our main educational obligation (no. 60).

It is very important that we also set a few men aside to work on the nature and contents of faith-justice education and on the best methods or means to impart it. We have many of our men involved in teaching at the secondary and higher education levels, but we have only a few devoted to reflecting critically on education as such. This reflection would explore topics such as the nature and functions of Catholic colleges and universities in the world of today, the priorities to be given in the choice of the faculties or departments that Catholic educational institutions should embrace, and the personal and social values that are de facto transmitted or could and should be transmitted through our present educational system. It is encouraging to note the significant work already being done in this country by the Jesuit Secondary Education Association, in its research efforts to explore the curricular implications of faith-justice education.

#### 4. Faith-Justice Spirituality

Because of present needs and also because of our religious and Ignatian tradition, spirituality and spiritual formation constitute for us another area of priority in our response to Decree Four. I am not thinking so much of retreats or spiritual direction, nor in terms of Jesuit spirituality only. Rather, there is need for gradually elaborating the foundation and drawing the main lines of a spirituality and spiritual formation which meet the needs of our times in the light of the faith-justice problems and of the factors conditioning the way an American sees herself or himself today as a believer, as a practicing Christian or Catholic.

This is a complex and long-term task. I feel that it is a task that the Society should undertake, alone or preferably in collaboration with others. What I am proposing would be the counterpart, in the field of spirituality, of the broader interdisciplinary reflection on contemporary society that I mentioned before. In the field of spiritual formation, it would be the necessary complement of a faith-justice education. All these efforts, of course, are interdependent and can and should help each other.

It is not enough, in order to elaborate an effective faith-justice spirituality, simply to "moralize" or to add a few social considerations or applications in our preaching, in our retreats, or in the spiritual direction and formation that we give. Nor can we place spirituality merely at the service of socio-economic change or of the promotion of social justice alone. The problems, as we saw, are more complex and much deeper. They raise questions regarding the nature of the specific Christian contribution to social and cultural change, as distinct from values of a purely human or secular nature or from contributions that the world is quite capable of making on its own. Can the role of Christianity in the social field be merely reduced to the strengthening or deepening of values or commitments that already exist or may exist without Christianity's help? Or does that contribution imply something more or something different? Because there are no easy answers, the task of elaborating a faith-justice spirituality for our age demands a deep, sustained, and systematic approach.

While we work on that long-term objective in the field of spirituality, we should also offer the first fruits of our work and reflection to all those responsible for the spiritual formation of leaders, both lay and clerical, and to those occupying positions of responsibility in the Church. These would include bishops, parish priests, religious educators, seminary professors, retreat directors, formation directors, campus ministers, leaders of youth movements, and so forth. To be honest, I do not believe that we can afford having too many of our Jesuits engaged in giving retreats and spiritual direction or formation on a one-to-one or a one-to-a-few basis, or primarily to the traditional religious audiences. We must concentrate on a spiritual formation that will have a much greater multiplying effect.

## B. Conditions for Future Responses

### 1. Higher Level of Contact with Reality

It is not sufficient that we Jesuits merely prioritize a few major areas of concern in which there seems to be greater need today, and in which we are or should be especially qualified to make a contribution. In my opinion we cannot adequately meet the future demands of faith and justice unless we also raise the level at which we work. We must do this in order to widen the scope of that work and to increase the range of the objectives



that we pursue through it. I suggest that, while maintaining a vital contact with the concrete reality of unbelief and injustice and keeping that reality always before our eyes, more of those Jesuits who can work at a higher level be encouraged, trained, and prepared to do so.

By a "higher" level I mean a "more universal" level in the Ignatian sense (*Constitutions*, [622, d]). Here our apostolic action could have a wider and more lasting impact. This higher level enables us to perceive problems in all their extension and to discover their varied and complex causes: religious, cultural, structural, ideological. The whole body of the Society would benefit from such an effort, as we could gain a wider perspective of the problems confronting us, in all their historical, geographic, and sectoral interrelations, and also a better and longer view of the path ahead of us. We cannot have a deep and lasting impact on contemporary problems, I believe, unless we shift some of our resources to this higher level of contact with reality.

I think this approach is very much in keeping with our tradition and the Ignatian criteria for the choice of ministries. The main problem, however, is to effect that shift without sacrificing any of the options taken by the last Congregation--such as an effective solidarity with the poor--or without losing the advantages of the interplay between reflection and action. We cannot simply go back to former positions which today are certainly less effective.

Apart from those who can work at a higher level, all of us Jesuits, whatever be our task or the level at which we perform it, need to take some reflective distance from the work we are doing. We need to reflect on it in the light of our corporate faith-justice commitment and of the concrete priorities through which that commitment has been expressed in our own province. Without that reflection, apostolic evaluation and renewal would remain a dream. Moreover the dialogue between those engaged at a higher level of contact with reality and those more actively committed to educational, social, and pastoral projects would become very difficult if not impossible.

## 2. Shifting of Resources

What I propose cannot be achieved unless we free resources--men, time, finances--to do it. This is obvious. It is not a question of whether we



are already getting some good results with what we are doing at present and in the way we are doing it, but of whether a greater good could and should be achieved through other means. I simply do not see how we can meet new and urgent needs if, faced with ever decreasing resources, we decide in advance to keep all our present commitments. This is even more difficult, of course, where, as it happens in some provinces, traditional works and institutions keep on increasing, if not always in number then often in size.

In many provinces there is already a dangerous disproportion between available resources and present apostolic commitments. This often has a deep and detrimental effect on the religious and apostolic "health" of individuals, communities, and apostolic works. Jesuits are too busy or too tired to reflect and to evaluate, much less to consider new commitments or even to attempt to give a new orientation or dimension to what they are already doing. If we are honest, we will admit that the image that some of our Jesuit communities still project is that of overtired or overcommitted people, or of people that do not seem too convinced that what they are doing is the right or the best thing to do.

Aside from the serious problem that this situation raises regarding religious vitality and apostolic effectiveness, such a Jesuit image is hardly the ideal one to attract new recruits to the Society! This is a critical issue demanding some hard decisions. The disproportion between available resources and needs to be met, and the nature of the commitments that I have described, would also require a much greater interprovincial collaboration and pooling of resources. In my opinion the American Assistancy is often leading others in this regard today. Yet I still believe that such a collaboration should be developed further.

### 3. A New Asceticism

The Society of Jesus today faces a demand for a greater discipline, a new type of austerity and asceticism. As a body, we cannot meet adequately the challenges of faith and justice if we operate as a group of dedicated and enthusiastic, but not very competent or well-disciplined, amateurs. Nor can we sacrifice long-term objectives and results for the sake of winning a few popular votes or a few immediate and small victories only. It is true that we have to advance step by step. Small results are important, and often they may be the only thing we can hope to achieve here and now.

We know the dictum: "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." But our candle should at least throw some light--even if it is only a little light--on what really needs to be clarified or to be done today. Our small steps or immediate results should be in line with, and subordinated to, a broader and far-reaching apostolic policy and strategy to serve the faith and promote justice.

All this presupposes that as a group of men we are gradually coming out from some of the existential or identity crises that shook us--like the rest of the Church--during the last fifteen years. It presupposes that most of us feel less insecure, stronger and more mature, less in need of affective supports or of activities or ministries offering some immediate rewards and satisfaction. It presupposes that we are willing and humanly prepared to sacrifice some of our more personal needs for the sake of others and of a great ideal: the faith-justice ideal. It also presupposes that we are willing to undergo the training and formation which that hard and long battle requires. Finally, it presupposes that we learn to find God--the God that is always greater--in the performance of tasks which have a deeper and more lasting effect and which, being more universal, are also more divine (*Constitutions*, [622, d]).

## CONCLUSION

A decade ago, I was invited to give a talk to the United States Jesuit Missions Directors that was later published in *Studies in the International Apostolate of Jesuits* (Vol. I, no. 2, September, 1972). Today I would not repeat all that I said at that time. However, there is a passage in that paper that still expresses my present concern.

The Church should not only define what her mission concretely means today, but also discover what might be called the right *level* and point of *insertion* in a rapidly-changing world; the point of insertion that will ensure that the Church is always there where the action is; the right level that will enable her to remain in close contact both with the world and with the values that transcend it. Thus there will be no danger for the Church of losing her relevance, of being left behind. She will be in position of not simply undergoing change, but of influencing it and making it humanly meaningful and liberating (p. 91).

I advocate a more diversified and integrated approach to faith-justice

problems, and this at a level that will enable us to exercise a more universal and lasting influence, because I feel that the problems we shall face during the coming decades will certainly include those envisioned by Decree Four of the 32nd General Congregation. But in a way the problems will be seen to be even more serious as we place them in a wider and deeper perspective. The crises ahead of us--some of which we are already today experiencing--will not merely concern material poverty and social injustice, but also many other dimensions of the life of women and men on this planet. They will affect values and institutions that are at the very basis of our culture.

Therefore we cannot as a body identify ourselves too closely and exclusively with problems as they manifest themselves here and now and at levels at which the pace of change is always much faster. We should remain in contact with reality, but in such a way that we are not left behind and that what we have to say does not become too soon obsolete or irrelevant. Only in this way can we offer true faith and justice to our contemporaries, particularly to the very poor that we want to serve and ultimately liberate.



## AFTERWORD

by

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In the events since the end of the 32nd General Congregation, Decree Four has probably caused in the Society of Jesus more discussion and debate--indeed, at times more division--than any other recent Jesuit document. Its strong call has been heard by some as a reaffirmation, by others as a rebuke. Its implementation is viewed by some as a source of hope and vitality, by others as a cause of disarray and decline. Many Jesuits lament that whole-hearted response to Decree Four has been lacking in the Society. Many others point to faults within the document itself which account for at least some of the less-than-enthusiastic response.

I believe that in the Society in the United States we are now at a point where a critical reflection on Decree Four is both necessary and possible. It is necessary because, in the hard evaluations of our ministries which events and resources relentlessly push upon us, the radical character of the Society's mission today must not be blurred through confusion, fear, or false steps. It is possible because we have matured enough in the experience of the mission commitment to recognize that questions or challenges need not be escapes, defenses, or "put-downs."

Francisco Ivern's "Critical Review of Decree Four" comes at the right moment. It does, however, raise more questions than it answers. Nevertheless it provides a much needed analytical overview of the challenges to be faced if the faith-justice mission is to stay alive in the years ahead. Of the many implications for the American Assistancy which are raised in the paper, let me point to three which seem to me to be crucial at this time.

1. *Cultural emphasis.* Of particular importance in my opinion is Ivern's emphasis on the cultural dimension of both the crisis which faces us and the response which we should make. He stresses the need to examine not only the socio-economic causes of injustice but also its socio-religious and socio-cultural roots. The Jesuit response should take seriously the values, symbols, myths which provide meaning for people and directly or indirectly make an impact on situations of justice.

Last year the provincials of the American Assistancy invited us Jesuits of the United States to reflect with them on "the context of our ministries." A central theme of the working papers prepared for the *Context* study was "inculturation" or the task of making the faith alive within the unique American way of life. According to the study, there is much in the North American culture which is supportive of evangelical values, but there is also much which is destructive. Extreme individualism, competition, materialism, consumerism--these and other cultural values need to be critically examined if a faith-justice mission is to be effective in this country. As the *Context* study noted, the challenge Christians face in the United States today is to work that the faith may be "inculturated" (incarnated, contextualized) without being "acculturated" (domesticated, smothered).

It frequently occurs that those committed to social change for justice pay insufficient attention to cultural factors. This definitely lessens the effectiveness of our response. To take but one example, the current arms race cannot be adequately analyzed if we focus only on political and economic factors (for example, international balance of power, influence of military-industrial complex) and ignore cultural factors (for example, longing for "security," the myth of being "number one"). Ivern's emphasis on the importance of culture calls us Jesuits to examine our critical understanding of the deepest American values operative today.

2. *Higher level of contact with reality.* Possibly the most challenging call of Ivern--because the most difficult to implement--is his insistence on the need for a "higher level of contact with reality." In the abstract, this may sound merely like a repetition of the Ignatian principle of pursuing the more universal good. But in the concrete, this call has definite formation and ministerial consequences for North American Jesuits. It may move some Jesuits out of simply "academic" research on social issues, and move others out of simply "direct involvement" with the immediate needs of the poor and oppressed. This is neither to put down basic research on current social problems nor to advocate the suppression of insertion programs in poor areas. Both projects are urgent and Ivern strongly favors them.

But something deeper is at issue here. How are we Jesuits going to go about the research and insertion? What is the relationship between the two? At what level are we active? Whom do we seek to influence and how? The call of Decree Four, reiterated by Ivern, is for us Jesuits to devote



more of our energies to analyzing and suppressing the causes ultimately responsible for social injustices. It is a call to relate to the structures which shape our society, the power centers which most widely influence people's lives, the actors whose decisions affect history, the values which determine the direction of popular consciousness.

This emphasis, it seems to me, has serious implications for the formation of younger Jesuits (for example, the importance to be given to the social sciences and to communication skills) as well as for our educational apostolates (for example, the value orientation of professional training, the critical stances taken on public issues). It also provides a sharp criterion of evaluation for those of us engaged in specific social ministries.

3. *Social spirituality*. In his call for an elaboration of a faith-justice spirituality for our age, Ivern touches on a point central to Jesuit life and apostolate. But the development in his paper seems to make more clear what he does not want (for example, a social "moralizing," a subordination of spirituality to a political project, and an excessive concentration on one-to-one spiritual direction) than exactly what he does want.

Surely the basic themes of Decree Four have close relationships to our spirituality. It could not be otherwise, since in essence the faith-justice mission is but the contemporary rendering of the Kingdom call "to labor with me" of the *Spiritual Exercises*. How to translate this into elements of a social spirituality which we Jesuits can both live by and communicate to others is an exciting challenge. A few elements which occur to me from Ivern's critical review of Decree Four involve pursuit of these questions:

As we have come to understand better the life of the spirit through our use of insights from personal psychology and developmental studies, what can social psychology, anthropology, cultural analysis, and the like tell us of the formation and practice of a mature spirituality?

What is the meaning of a "new asceticism" in an age marked both by affluence and self-indulgence and by loneliness and fear of the future? What is the need for a special asceticism to be practiced by those who would work at "higher levels of contact with reality" in order to keep them in touch with the poor and uncontaminated by the style of the powerful?

What would be the lines of a "social discernment of spirits," or a "discernment of social spirits," whereby we would aim to discern the movements of God in the larger events of history and in the struggles of people for liberation? How is this "reading of the signs of the times" related to our tradition of being "contemplatives in action"?



What is the relationship between "thinking with the Church" and the call for "prophetic witness" today? Can there be a "prophetic community"? What spirituality marks solidarity movements in the struggle for social change?

Careful study of Ivern's paper will of course indicate additional implications for the American Assistancy. How we Jesuits in the United States--and around the world--will go forward in our response to Decree Four is a matter of importance not simply to the Society, not simply to the Church, but also to that world marked by the twin evils of injustice and unbelief. How we will do it in a manner in keeping with the wishes of Pope John Paul II, the call of our Ignatian tradition, and the needs of our contemporary context is an immense challenge. This will be a primary challenge for the 33rd General Congregation and for the years ahead.

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